

## Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

### Listing of Claims:

1. **(currently amended)** A method for parallel approval of an electronic document by a plurality of users, comprising the steps of:

- A) generating an original Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC 0", linked to the electronic document;
- B) making the electronic document available to each user; and
- C) for approval by each user, performing the sub-steps of:
  - i) opening the electronic document for approval;
  - ii) retrieving DAC 0;
  - iii) said user approving the electronic document by generating approval information;
  - iv) generating for the electronic document an approval Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC x";
  - v) comparing DAC x to DAC 0, and proceeding with the approval only if DAC x is equal to DAC 0; and
  - vi) storing said approval information in a user Approval Data Packet, hereinafter referred to as "ADPx".

2. **(original)** A method according to claim 1, further comprising an additional step of:

- D) incorporating the approval information from each ADP x into the electronic document.

3. **(original)** A method according to claim 2, wherein step D) comprises the sub-steps of:

- i) copying the electronic document into an insertion electronic document;
- ii) retrieving DAC 0; and
- iii) for each ADP x, performing the sub-steps of:
  - a) opening ADP x;
  - b) retrieving DAC x;
  - c) comparing DAC x to DAC 0, and proceeding only if DAC x is equal to DAC 0;
  - d) inserting approval information stored in ADP x into the insertion electronic document; and

e) generating a new Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC 0", linked to the insertion electronic document.

4. (original) A method according to claim 3, wherein sub-step D) iii) d) comprises including the approval information at a pre-targeted location in the insertion electronic document.

5. (original) A method according to claim 2, wherein step D) comprises the sub-steps of:

- i) opening the electronic document;
- ii) for each ADP x, performing the sub-steps of:
  - a) opening ADP x;
  - b) inserting approval information stored in ADP x into the electronic document, thereby generating a modified electronic document ; and
  - c) generating a new Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC 0", linked to the modified electronic document.

6. (original) A method according to claim 5, wherein the inserting of sub-step D) iii) d) comprises including the approval information at a pre-targeted location in the electronic document.

7. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein sub-step C) vi) comprises encrypting ADPx.

8. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein step A) comprises encrypting DAC 0.

9. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein, in substep C) vi), the approval information comprises DAC x.

10. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein, in substep C) vi), the approval information comprises a signature of the user.

11. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein, in substep C) vi), the approval information comprises biometric information related to the user.

12. **(original)** A method according to claim 1, wherein, in substep C) vi), the approval information comprises a date and a time at which substep C) ii) was executed.

13. **(currently amended)** A method for parallel approval of an electronic document by a plurality of users, comprising the steps of:

A) generating an original Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC 0", linked to the electronic document;

B) making the electronic document available to each user;

C) for approval by each user, performing the substeps of:

i) opening the electronic document for approval;

ii) each user approving the electronic document by generating approval information;

iii) generating for the electronic document an approval Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC x";

iv) storing said approval information in a user Approval Data Packet, hereinafter referred to as "ADP x"; and

D) for authenticating authenticating the approval by each user, performing for each DAC x the sub-steps of:

i) retrieving DAC 0 and DAC x; and

ii) comparing DAC x to DAC 0, and accepting the approval only if DAC x is equal to DAC 0.

14. **(original)** A method according to claim 13, further comprising the steps of:

E) inserting approval information stored in ADP x for each user into the electronic document, thereby generating a modified electronic document ; and

F) generating a new Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC 0", linked to the modified electronic document.

15. **(original)** A method according to claim 13, wherein sub-step C) iv) comprises encrypting ADP x.

16. **(original)** A method according to claim 13, wherein step A) comprises encrypting DAC 0.

17. (original) A method according to claim 13, wherein, in sub-step C) iv), the approval information comprises DAC x.

18. (original) A method according to claim 13, wherein, in sub-step C) iv), the approval information comprises a signature of the user.

19. (original) A method according to claim 13, wherein, in sub-step C) iv), the approval information comprises biometric information related to the user.

20. (original) A method according to claim 13, wherein, in sub-step C) iv), the approval information comprises a date and a time at which sub-step C) ii) was executed.

21. (currently amended) A method for parallel approval of sections of an electronic document by a plurality of users, the method comprising the steps of:

A) generating for each section of the electronic document an original section Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC<sub>s</sub> 0", linked to said section of the electronic document;  
B) making the electronic document available to each user; and  
C) for approval by each user of corresponding sections of the electronic document, performing the sub-steps of:

- i) opening the electronic document for approval;
- ii) selecting the corresponding sections for approval;
- iii) retrieving each of the DAC<sub>s</sub> 0 linked to the corresponding sections of the electronic document;
- iv) each user approving the corresponding sections of the electronic document by generating approval information;
- v) generating for each corresponding sections a section approval Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC<sub>s</sub> x";
- vi) comparing the DAC<sub>s</sub> x to the corresponding DAC<sub>s</sub> 0, and proceeding with the approval only if in each case DAC<sub>s</sub> x is equal to DAC<sub>s</sub> 0; and
- vii) storing said approval information in a user Approval Data Packet, hereinafter referred to as "ADPx".

22. (original) A method according to claim 21, further comprising an additional step of: D) incorporating the approval information from each ADP x into the electronic document.

23. (original) A method according to claim 22, wherein step D) comprises, for each ADP x, performing the sub-steps of:

- i) opening the ADP x
- ii) selecting and opening a target section of the electronic document wherein the approval information is to be inserted;
- iii) retrieving the DAC<sub>s</sub> 0 and DAC<sub>s</sub> x corresponding to said target section;
- iv) comparing DAC<sub>s</sub> x to DAC<sub>s</sub> 0, and proceeding only if DAC<sub>s</sub> x is equal to DAC<sub>s</sub> 0;
- v) inserting approval information stored in ADP x into the target section of the electronic document, thereby generating a modified section of the electronic document ; and
- vi) generating a new section Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC<sub>s</sub> 0", linked to the modified electronic document.

24. (original) A method according to claim 23, wherein the inserting of sub-step D) v) comprises including the approval information at a pre-targeted location in the target section of the electronic document.

25. (original) A method according to claim 22, wherein step D) comprises, for each ADP x, performing the sub-steps of:

- i) opening the ADP x
- ii) selecting and opening a target section of the electronic document wherein the approval information is to be inserted;
- iii) inserting approval information stored in ADP x into the target section of the electronic document, thereby generating a modified section of the electronic document; and
- iv) generating a new section Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC<sub>s</sub> 0", linked to the modified electronic document.

26. (original) A method according to claim 25, wherein the inserting of sub-step D) iii) comprises including the approval information at a pre-targeted location in the target section of the electronic document.

27. (original) A method according to claim 21, wherein sub-step C) vii) comprises encrypting ADP x.

28. (original) A method according to claim 21, wherein step A) comprises encrypting each DAC<sub>s</sub> 0.

29. (original) A method according to claim 21, wherein, in sub-step C) vii), the approval information comprises DAC<sub>s</sub> x.

30. (original) A method according to claim 21, wherein, in sub-step C) vii), the approval information comprises a signature of the user.

31. (original) A method according to claim 21, wherein, in sub-step C) vii), the approval information comprises biometric information related to the user.

32. (original) A method according to claim 21, wherein, in sub-step C) vii), the approval information comprises a date and a time at which sub-step C) iv) was executed.

33. (currently amended) A method for parallel approval of sections of an electronic document by a plurality of users, each section being approved by a single user, the method comprising the steps of:

A) making the electronic document available to each user; and

B) for approval by each user of a corresponding section of the electronic document, performing the sub-steps of:

- i) opening the electronic document for approval;
- ii) selecting the corresponding section for approval;
- iii) each user approving the corresponding section of the electronic document by generating approval information;

- iv) generating for the corresponding section a section approval Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC<sub>s</sub> x";
- v) storing said approval information in a user Approval Data Packet, hereinafter referred to as "ADP x".

34. **(original)** A method according to claim 33, wherein sub-step B) v) comprises encrypting ADP x.

35. **(original)** A method according to claim 33, wherein sub-step B) iv) comprises encrypting DAC<sub>s</sub> x.

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36. **(original)** A method according to claim 33, wherein, in sub-step B) v), the approval information comprises DAC<sub>s</sub> x.

37. **(original)** A method according to claim 33, wherein, in sub-step B) v), the approval information comprises a signature of the user.

38. **(original)** A method according to claim 33, wherein, in sub-step B) v), the approval information comprises biometric information related to the user.

39. **(original)** A method according to claim 33, wherein, in sub-step B) v), the approval information comprises a date and a time at which sub-step B) iii) was executed.

40. **(twice amended)** A method of merging a plurality of approved electronic documents or sections of a document into a single approved master document, the method comprising the steps of:

A) approving the electronic documents by performing, for each of said electronic documents, the sub-steps of:

- i) generating an original Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC 0", linked to the electronic document;
- ii) having the electronic document made available to each user;
- iii) for approval by each user, performing the sub-steps of:
  - a) opening the electronic document for approval;

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- b) each user approving the electronic document by generating approval information;
- c) generating for the electronic document an approval Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DAC x";
- d) storing approval information in a user Approval Data Packet, hereinafter referred to as "ADP x";

B) generating the master document;

C) generating a master Data Authentication Code and a master Approval Data Packet, respectively hereinafter referred to as "DACm 0", and ADPm, both linked to said master document; and

D) for merging of each electronic document, performing the sub-steps of:

- i) opening the electronic document;
- ii) retrieving the DAC 0 and DAC x linked to said electronic document;
- iii) comparing DAC x to DAC 0, and proceeding only if DAC x is equal to DAC 0; and
- iv) incorporating the electronic document into the master document;
- v) generating a new Data Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as "DACm 0" linked to the master document incorporating said electronic document; and
- vi) storing ADP x corresponding to said electronic document into ADPm.

41. **(original)** A method according to claim 40, wherein:

sub-step A) iii) c) comprises encrypting ADP x; and  
step C) comprises encrypting ADPm.

42. **(original)** A method according to claim 40, wherein:

sub-step A) i) comprises encrypting DAC 0; and  
step C) comprises encrypting DACm 0.

43. **(original)** A method according to claim 40, wherein, in sub-step A) iii) d), the approval information comprises DAC x.

44. **(original)** A method according to claim 40, wherein, in sub-step A) iii) d), the approval information comprises a signature of the user.

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45. (original) A method according to claim 40, wherein, in sub-step A) iii) d), the approval information comprises biometric information related to the user.

46. (original) A method according to claim 40, wherein, in sub-step A) iii) d), the approval information comprises a date and a time at which sub-step A) iii) b) was executed.

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